(e) if so, the outcome thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI PRENEET KAUR): (a) The provisions of 'Employ American Workers Act' of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act impose restrictions on hiring foreign workers with H-1B visas by US firms receiving bailout money under the Troubled Assets Relief Programme (TARP). Companies that have received federal bailout money are mostly banks, insurance companies and auto companies. The new guidelines require that a company receiving TARP funds and applying for workers under H-1B must operate as an "H-1B dependent company". That means it should attest to actively recruiting American workers, not displacing American workers with H-1B visa holders; and not replacing laid off American workers with foreign workers. The H-1B dependent companies are those which have 15% of their workforce carrying H-1B visas.

(b) According to NASSCOM, the H-1B visa restrictions may not affect employees of Indian outsourcing companies as they do not receive any TARP support.

(c) Yes.

(d) and (e) Visa issue being a sovereign function of a foreign Government, Government of India has been sensitizing the US Government on the need to expand the allocation of H-1B visas which may be availed of by Indian professionals.

Introduction of e-passport system

1388. SHRI Y.P. TRIVEDI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the e-passport system is being introduced by Government in order to prevent the misutilization of passport;

(b) whether this would be introduced for the administrative officers, on a trial basis;

(c) if so, by when it would be introduced; and

(d) if not, whether Government is contemplating in this direction?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SHASHI THAROOR): (a) Yes.

(b) to (d) A pilot project for the issue of e-passports in the category of officials and diplomatic passports has already been launched on 25th June, 2008.

Indian Embassy in Australia

1389. SHRI D. RAJA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware that the Indian Embassy in Australia had received a number of complaints from Indian students over the last two years;

(b) if so, the reason for the Indian Embassy being a silent spectator to the difficulties of Indian students in Australia;

(c) whether any explanation has been sought from the Indian Embassy in Australia in this regard; and

(d) the steps proposed to examine the functioning of the Indian Embassy?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI PRENEET KAUR): (a) Yes.

(b) The Indian High Commission in Canberra and the Consulates General of India in Sydney and Melbourne have not been silent spectators to the difficulties of Indian students in Australia. Well aware of the difficulties faced by Indian students, they have been constantly taking up the complaints and concerns with all the authorities concerned in Australia at the federal and State Government level as well as with the universities, educational institutions and related University Associations in Australia, seeking to address the problems.

(c) and (d) Do not arise.

Death sentence to Sarabjit Singh

1390. SHRI RAJEEV SHUKLA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Pakistan's Supreme Court has dismissed the appeal of Sarabjit Singh, an Indian seeking a review of a death sentence;

(b) if so, whether Government of India proposes to take up the matter with Government of Pakistan; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI PRENEET KAUR): (a) to (c) We have seen reports that the Pakistan Supreme Court has turned down a review petition regarding the death sentence awarded to Sarabjit Singh. We have consistently urged the Government of Pakistan to take a sympathetic and humanitarian view in the case. It is our hope that they will find it possible to do so.

Repatriation of people from Pakistan

†1391. SHRI OM PRAKASH MATHUR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether many civilians from border districts of Rajasthan such as Jaisalmer, Barmer and Ganganagar had crossed the Pakistan border during the past many decades owing to human error and they are confined in the jails there; if so, the number of such civilian;

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.